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Subject: Western News: EPA: Water lawn before you mow

EPA: Water lawn before you mow

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A preliminary study of the health risk of asbestos in Libby shows that while the town is cleaner, health dangers remain here.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency released its draft toxicity study Tuesday at a public meeting at the Libby Memorial Center. The report comes more than a decade after the EPA began its cleanup work.

The report shows that Libby's ambient air is now safe.

&We are clearly making progress,8 Jim Martin EPA,s Region 8 administrator said. &There is more work to be done.8

The EPA admits that some areas, even those that have already been cleaned, remain a risk.

The draft toxicity study was released early to keep Libby and Troy residents informed. The agency has faced criticism in the past for declaring areas safe where risk remained.

The EPA is recommending Libby residents continue to take precautions against inhaling asbestos fibers.

&We suggest that you wet your yard before you mow it,8 said Carol Campbell, assistant regional administrator for ecosystem protection and remediation.

Campbell admits that watering a lawn before mowing it can be difficult, but she said it,s important to minimize the risk.

&You live and work here,8 Campbell said. &There,s always going to be an asbestos exposure in Libby.
8

&It,s better to be safe than sorry,8 she added later. &Even if your yard has been cleaned, your neighbors, might not have.8

The EPA also continues to recommend that folks who discover vermiculite in their yard or home contact the EPA to perform cleanup.

The draft study shows that cleanup actions have reduced exposures in Libby. Specifically, the ambient air concentrations of Libby amphibole asbestos appear to be lower than the EPA,s target level of a hazard index of less than 1 for non-cancer health impacts such as shortness of breath and chest pain. The cancer risk remains right at the EPA,s target level for risk.

Both risks have decreased significantly since 1990 before cleanup began, according to EPA officials.

However, the draft toxicity also shows that some indoor and outdoor activities increase the release of asbestos into the air and may result in levels of risk above the EPA targets for non-cancer health risks. Doing housework increases the risk slightly. While working outside, particularly for those who spend a significant amount of time outside like a landscaper, can significantly increase the risk of becoming sick.

The cancer risk from asbestos is within the target range for safety. However, just as with non-cancer risks certain activities can increase the risk of cancer from asbestos exposure.

The risk is significantly higher for those working in yards that have not been cleaned or yards that were cleaned in 2006 and 2007. Exposure from yards cleaned in 2009 are well below the cancer risk.

EPA officials say they plan to use the draft and eventually the final study to continue asbestos cleanup work. The draft will be reviewed and a final document is expected in the fall of 2012.

The EPA is also working on an assessment to estimate the cumulative risk for a person who is a lifelong resident of Libby.

Since 1999, EPA has been focusing on the largest sources of exposure. The agency has spent more than \$330 million and 85,000 dump trucks of soil have been removed from Libby.

To continue to decrease the potential for exposure, the EPA plans to begin cleaning alleys between houses and entire neighborhoods. In the past, work has focused on individual houses. About 150 homes are slated for cleanup this summer.

EPA officials encourage those who haven,t had their homes cleaned to do so.

&Every one of you please have your yards cleaned up,8 Campbell said. &Please encourage your neighbors to have their yards cleaned up.

Some sites will have to be cleaned again. The criteria for cleaning has changed and more soil will be removed than has in past cleanup work, officials note. All fill material is now being brought in from outside the Libby valley.

Air monitoring and sampling activities are still taking place, as well. Last year, the EPA began testing on highways 37 and 2 as well as Pipe Creek Road, Farm to Market Road and Kootenai River Road. A remedial investigation report is being prepared based on the testing.

Last year testing was also performed near the former W.R. Grace vermiculite mine site. The testing includes activity based sampling for exposures associated with hikers, campers, ATV riders and fire

harvest. Collection of surface water samples and amphibian and fish toxicity is expected this year.

As a result of testing, the EPA suggests that residents only cut and gather firewood from outside of the Libby valley. Asbestos fibers were detected in both the tree bark and forest ground coverings as far as eight miles away from the mine.

Asbestos fibers released from the former W.R. Grace vermiculite caused Libby to be contaminated with asbestos. The EPA began cleanup activities in 2000 and in 2003 the area was listed as a Superfund site.

In 2009, EPA administrator Lisa Jackson declared a public health emergency in Libby. It was the first of its kind under the federal Superfund law.

The EPA has begun holding question and answer sessions with the public. The sessions are the second Tuesday of each month from 5:30 to 6:30 p.m. at Flathead Valley Community College, Lincoln County Campus.

For more information on the draft toxicity and on the cleanup activities in Libby and Troy, visit <http://www.epa.gov/libby>.

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